

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4089
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AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LENINGRAD 00725

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SCUL, SHUM, PINS, UR
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. SUMMARY. CALL ON VILNIUS CATHOLIC PRIMUS, KRIVAITIS, DURING RECENT OFFICIAL VISIT OF CONSUL GENERAL TO VILNIUS PROVIDED CHANCE TO GAIN SOME IMPRESSIONS ON CURRENT STATUS OF LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. KRIVAITIS' REMARKS CONFIRMED OTHER INFORMATION THAT OVERALL POSITION OF CHURCH IS EASING AND CHURCH IS CAUTIOUSLY STRENGTHENING ITS POSITION, AS CONDITIONS ALLOW. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING RECENT OFFICIAL VISIT TO VILNIUS, CONSUL GENERAL, ACCOMPANIED BY WIFE AND CONGENOFF, CALLED ON PRIMUS OF CATHOLIC CURIA IN CITY, MONSIGNOR KRAVAITIS. VILNIUS FONMIN PROTOCOL SECTION WOULD NOT ITSELF ARRANGE REQUESTED CALL OSTENSIBLY BECAUSE THIS WOULD CONSTITUTE STATE INTERFERENCE IN AFFAIRS OF CHURCH. BUT, TIME WAS BLOCKED OUT IN OFFICIAL PROGRAM FOR CALL AND PARTY WAS GIVEN REQUIRED TELEPHONE NUMBERS TO MAKE OWN ARRANGEMENTS. SEMINARY SCHOOLMATE, FATHER DEVSNUS, BUT NO SOVIET OFFICIAL, SAT IN DURING VISIT. MONSIGNOR
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KRIVAITIS, CLEARLY HIGHLY PLEASED BY VISIT, SEEMED INITIALLY SOMEWHAT NERVOUS, BUT VISIT CONCLUDED IN ATMOSPHERE OF FRANKNESS AND WARM HOSPITALITY.

3. OBSERVATIONS OF CHURCH SERVICES: FROM CG PARTY'S OWN OBSERVATIONS, SUNDAY SERVICES AT PETER AND PAUL CATHEDRAL AND POLISH DOMINICAN CHURCH WERE VERY CROWDED

WITH CROSS SECTION OF POPULATION OF ALL AGES, INCLUDING SEVERAL FATHERS BRINGING THEIR SMALL SONS TO CHURCH AND SHOWING THEM HOW TO CROSS THEMSELVES. LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH GAVE OVERALL IMPRESSION OF BEING CONSERVATIVE INSTITUTION, SOMEWHAT OUT OF MAINSTREAM OF CATHOLIC REFORM MOVEMENT ARISING FROM VATICAN COUNCILS, BUT AN ATTRACTIVE FORCE WHICH IS SLOWLY IMPROVING ITS POSITION IN LITHUANIAN SOCIETY. DURING ATTENDANCE AT CHURCH SERVICES, CONGREGANTS WERE STRUCK BY RELATIVELY PASSIVE ROLE OF CONGREGATION IN SERVICE AND BY FACT THAT PRIESTS CONTINUE OLD PRACTICE OF FACING ALTAR RATHER THAN CONGREGATION. MOREOVER, ONLY BEGINNING AND CONCLUDING PORTIONS OF SERVICES WERE IN LITHUANIAN (AND POLISH) WITH CENTRAL PART OF SERVICE REMAINING IN LATIN. SIMPLIFICATION OF CHURCH INTERIORS BY REDUCTION IN NUMBERS OF STATUES, SIDE ALTARS, ETC., ALSO NOT YET IN EVIDENCE. KRIVAITIS, WHO HAD ATTENDED ALL SESSIONS OF VATICAN COUNCIL, CONFIRMED THAT VATICAN COUNCIL REFORMS HERE NOT YET BEEN WIDELY INTRODUCED IN LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC PRACTICE. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT ALL DOCUMENTS CONNECTED WITH COUNCIL DECISIONS NOW HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO LITHUANIAN TO FAMILIARIZE CONGREGATIONS WITH NATURE OF REFORMS.

4. KRIVAITIS MADE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS ON OVERALL CURRENT SITUATION OF CHURCH:
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--GENERAL SITUATION OF LITHUANIAN CHURCH IS BECOMING "EASIER AND EASIER" COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS YEARS, WITH PROGRESS BEING MADE "BY DEGREES". HE NOTED THERE IS "NO COMPARISON" WITH STRICTURES OF STALIN'S TIME.

--PRIMUS INDICATED THERE ARE SIX DIOCESES IN LITHUANIA, OF WHICH TWO HAVE STATUS OF ARCHDIOCESE (KAUNAS AND VILNIUS).

--KRIVAITIS WAS RELUCTANT TO PUT ANY SPECIFIC FIGURE ON SIZE CATHOLIC CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN LITHUANIA, EITHER AS ABSOLUTE FIGURE OR AS PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION. HE NOTED THAT 87 PERCENT OF LITHUANIANS BEFORE WAR WERE CATHOLIC, BUT SAID THAT WAR LOSSES, EMIGRATION, RELUCTANCE SOME BELIEVERS TO ATTEND CHURCH, AND ATHEISTIC PROPAGATION, COMPLICATE ANY DETERMINATION OF PRECISE SIZE CURRENT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

--KRIVAITIS ESTIMATED THAT 90 PERCENT OF CHILDREN ARE STILL BAPTIZED IN CHURCH AND MAJORITY LITHUANIANS STILL PREFER CHURCH WEDDINGS. HE CHARACTERIZED RECENT EFFORTS

TO MAKE ZAGS CIVIL MARRIAGE PARLOR CEREMONIES MORE
TRADITIONAL AND ELEGANT AS OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO
CONTINUING POPULARITY OF CHURCH CEREMONY.
FURTHER EVIDENCE OF INFLUENCE OF CHURCH IS RELATIVELY
LOWER LITHUANIAN DIVORCE RATE AND REPUBLIC'S HIGHER
OVERALL BIRTH RATE.

--PRIMUS SAID THERE ARE 18 WORKING CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN
VILNIUS; 85 WORKING CHURCHES AND FIVE CHAPELS IN THE
VILNIUS ARCHDIOCESES; AND TOTAL OF 337 WORKING CATHOLIC

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CHURCHES IN LITHUANIA. EACH CHURCH HAS AVERAGE OF 3-5
SERVICES ON SUNDAY, AND MORNING AND EVENING SERVICES
EACH WORKING DAY. SOME, HOWEVER, HAVE MORE.
KRIVAITIS' CHURCH OFFERS SIX SUNDAY SERVICES AND SOME
CHURCHES OFFER AS MANY AS EIGHT.

--CHURCH MAINTAINS CATHOLIC SEMINARY IN KAUNAS.
SEMINARY CURRENTLY HAS 65 SEMINARIANS, WITH ABOUT 20
NEW STUDENTS ENTERING EACH YEAR, A BETTER RESULT THAN AT
ANY TIME IN POST WAR PERIOD. KRIVAITIS EXPRESSED HOPE
THAT IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS THERE WILL BE TOTAL OF
100 SEMINARIANS. SEMINARY LASTS FOR FIVE YEARS BUT ALSO
HAS FACULTY APPROVED BY VATICAN FOR ISSUING DOCTORATE
DEGREES.

--CHURCH HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY PERMITTED TO PUBLISH
VARIOUS CHURCH MATERIALS. MATERIALS MUST BE APPROVED
BY LITURGICAL COMMISSION WHICH IN TURN MUST HAVE
PRIOR APPROVAL FROM MOSCOW. CHURCH, HOWEVER, NOT

DISCOURAGED FROM PETITIONING COMMISSION AND, IF
APPROVAL RECEIVED, MATERIALS ARE PRINTED ON STATE
PRINTING PRESSES. IN RECENT YEARS, LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH HAS SUCCEEDED IN HAVING FOLLOWING PUBLISHED:
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3 BOOKS OF LITURGY AND SERVICE; TRANSLATION INTO
LITHUANIAN OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONNECTED WITH VATICAN
COUNCIL; LITURGICAL PRAYER BOOK (1975: 80,000 COPIES);
NEW TRANSLATION OF NEW TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE INCOR-
PORATING NEWEST RESEARCH (10,000 COPIES); PUBLICATION
OF NEW PSALTER; AND WORK IS FAR ALONG ON NEW TRANSLATION
INTO LITHUANIAN OF OLD TESTAMENT IN THREE TOMES.
TRANSLATION WORK IS DONE BY LITURGICAL COMMISSION WHICH
ALSO MAINTAINS SPECIALISTS FOR RELIGIOUS MUSIC, ART,
AND LITERATURE. HEAD OF LITHUANIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH HAS
COLLABORATED IN TRANSLATING NEW TESTAMENT.

--"NATURAL TIES" ARE CLOSE WITH POLES WHO ALSO
INDIRECTLY SUPPLY, MAINLY THROUGH FAMILY CONTACTS, MOST
OF THE POLISH LANGUAGE PRAYER BOOKS AND OTHER LITURGICAL
MATERIALS USED IN POLISH CHURCH SERVICES. THERE IS
ONE TOTALLY POLISH SPEAKING CHURCH IN VILNIUS AND TWO
TOTALLY LITHUANIAN SPEAKING CHURCHES. THE REMAINDER OF
THE CHURCHES, HOWEVER, HAVE RELIGIOUS SERVICES IN BOTH
LITHUANIAN AND POLISH LANGUAGES.

--MOSCOW CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FALLS WITHIN JURISDICTION
OF LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH; LENINGRAD'S SOLE CATHOLIC
CHURCH, HOWEVER, COMES UNDER JURISDICTION OF RIGA.

--AS ELSEWHERE UNDER SOVIET POWER, CONGREGATION IS
LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR CHURCH MAINTENANCE AND CONDITION
OF CHURCHES HAS DETERIORATED CONSIDERABLY VIS A VIS
PRE-WAR PERIOD WHEN CHURCH CONGREGATIONS OPENLY VIED
WITH EACH OTHER IN MAINTAINING BEAUTY OF THEIR
INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES. CLASSIC BAROQUE PETER AND PAUL
CATHEDRAL, HOWEVER, IS ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENT AND
THUS PRESERVED BY THE STATE. EVEN STATE OFFICIALS SUCH
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AS CITY ARCHITECT, HOWEVER, SEEMED OBVIOUSLY PROUD OF
ARCHITECTURAL SPLENDOR OF CITY'S MAIN HISTORICAL
CHURCHES AND MONEY IS BEING FOUND FROM VARIOUS OFFICIAL
FUNDS TO PRESERVE INTERIORS OF NON-WORKING CHURCHES BY
MAKING THEM INTO "MUSEUMS", CONCERT HALLS, AND SO FORTH.

--KRIVAITIS INDICATED THAT IN ADDITION TO CATHOLIC CHURCHES, VILNIUS HAS ORTHODOX BISHOP, LUTHERAN BISHOP (LUTHERANS HAVE TWO CHURCHES IN VILNIUS, THIRTY IN LITHUANIA), OLD BELIEVERS CHURCH, BAPTISTS AND PENTACOSTALIST COMMUNITIES, AND JEWISH SYNAGOGUE. THERE ARE GOOD ECUMENICAL TIES TO LUTHERAN AND ORTHODOX CHURCHES, BUT LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH MAINTAINS NO TIES TO BAPTIST. ACCORDING TO KRIVAITIS THERE ARE RELATIVELY FEW JEWS LEFT IN VILNIUS AND THEIR NUMBER IS BEING FURTHER DRAWN DOWN BY EMIGRATION.

5. NOTWITHSTANDING APPARENT ULCER CONDITION, KRIVAITIS JOINED IN RUSSIAN-STYLE HOSPITALITY AND WAS PREPARED TO DISCUSS MORE SENSITIVE ASPECTS OF CHURCH ACTIVITY.

--ASKED ABOUT CURRENT STATUS OF BISHOP STEPONAVICIUS, KRIVAITIS SAID THAT HE HAS "NOT FOUND COMMON LANGUAGE WITH AUTHORITIES" AND DOES NOT CURRENTLY EXERCISE HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AS BISHOP, BUT HE INDICATED HE THOUGHT THE SITUATION MIGHT CHANGE IN NEXT YEAR OR SO.

--ASKED ABOUT RELIGIOUS PRISONERS, HE QUIBBLED THAT THEY WERE NOT IN JAIL STRICTLY FOR RELIGIOUS BUT RATHER POLITICAL ACTIVITIES.

--ASKED HOW A YOUNG, AMBITIOUS PERSON CAN AFFORD TO GO

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TO CHURCH, KRIVAITIS SAID SOME DO NOT DARE; OTHERS GO TO SERVICES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE WHERE MOST HAVE RELATIONS AND ATTENDANCE IS EXPECTED.

--ON QUESTION OF CHURCH EDUCATION, KRIVAITIS EXPLAINED THAT TEACHING OF CATECHISM IS RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS BUT CHURCH IS ALLOWED TO EXAMINE AND CORRECT WHAT CHILDREN ARE BEING TAUGHT AT HOME (DOUBTLESS A CONVENIENT FICTION FOR SOME MEASURE OF EDUCATION).

--ASKED ABOUT WOMEN IN THE CHURCH, HE SAID THERE WAS SOME AGITATION BY WOMEN FOR ROLE AS PRIESTS. IN APPARENT REFERENCE TO "UNDERGROUND CHURCH" MOVEMENT, HE ADDED WITH ENTHUSIASM THAT THERE ARE 1,000 NUNS IN CIVILIAN DRESS WHO CIRCULATE AND E.G. CHECK ON CATECHISM BEING TAUGHT TO CHILDREN. RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HAS SOME 15 NUNS IN SIMILAR STATUS.

--ON THE QUESTION OF "THE CHRONICLE OF THE LITHUANIAN CHURCH," KRIVAITIS SHOWED SOME IMPATIENCE. WITHOUT DENYING THAT THEIR REPORTS HAVE A FACTUAL BASIS, HE INDICATED THAT, IN HIS VIEW, THEY DISTORT ISSUES BY CONDENSING AND TELESCOPING FACTS. HE ALSO SAID SOME-CONFIDENTIAL

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THING TO EFFECT, "JOURNAL IS NOT PUBLISHED HERE," AND GENERALLY INDICATED HE FELT IT COMPLICATED HIS TASK OF STRENGTHENING CHURCH BY KEEPING LOW PROFILE. BUCHANAN

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